



Venango County

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Testimony -- September 16, 2003
During Hearing by the House Committee
on Resources,
Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation, &
Public Lands

Washington, D.C.

Regarding H. R. 1862 --
Oil Region National Heritage Area Act

Testimony by Robert Murray,
Chairman, Board of Commissioners,
County of Venango,
Franklin, Pennsylvania

Mr. Chairman, Members of Congress, Committee Staff, Media, and Guests –

My name is Bob Murray and I currently serve as Chairman of the Board of Commissioners in Venango County, Pennsylvania. On behalf of the good people of Venango County, I bring greetings and a sincere appreciation for this opportunity to speak with you today about “The Valley That Changed the World”. In a moment, you’ll hear about the geography and the compelling history of the Oil Heritage Region. But first, you ought to know about the people of the world’s first oil patch. We are the proud sons and daughters of the Teamsters, the Steelworkers, the Coopers, the Drillers, and the Roughnecks of the Oil Industry. Our forefathers devised and built innovative transportation systems, financial institutions, commodity exchanges, manufacturing plants, and oil refineries.

Today, with much of the oil now depleted, production is minimal. We are attempting to diversify, modernize, and grow our economy, but the economic boom of the 1990’s never quite made it to Venango County and the last remnants of the big oil companies that were founded there – household names like Quaker State and Pennzoil – are now gone from our local economy. But the oil industry that that was born in Venango County continues to heavily influence the world economy and world events. Oil plays a significant role in our nation’s history, our nation’s way of life, our nation’s position in the world, and oil will continue to influence America and the world for decades to come.

Today, the oil patch is a lush, green, beautiful valley with an abundance of natural beauty. Its rivers, forests, and lakes make it attractive to visitors. The compelling history of the Oil Region combined with the raw beauty of our mountains, positions Venango County and eastern Crawford County to take special advantage of a National Heritage Designation.

Today oil fuels the pride, the nostalgia, and the enthusiasm we in Venango County have for the oil patch. We recognize the responsibilities that National Heritage designation will bring. I am here to tell you that the good people of Venango County will cherish and honor those responsibilities. The region already enjoys Heritage Park designation from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. For more than a decade, countless numbers of volunteers, innumerable hours, and hundreds of thousands of private dollars have been contributed to this effort.

Tireless, professional planning and management of the region have been a hallmark of its success to date.

Furthermore, the elected officials of the region recognize our responsibility to partner in this effort. Recently, the Venango County Board of Commissioners has granted \$50,000 to facilitate a current update of the Oil Heritage Region's Management Action Plan. Additionally, I have proposed to the Board of Commissioners that we appropriate an additional \$250,000 for feasibility analysis and pre-planning for the development of an "Oil Boomtown" to replicate one of the many small towns that sprang up overnight with the discovery of oil in our valley. It is my hope that attractions and amenities such as this can be developed for education, entertainment, and recreation.

It is also noteworthy that the Board of Commissioners has enacted a 3% hotel room tax to help fund the promotion and development of the travel industry in Venango County. Related revenues now exceed \$100,000 per year.

The Oil Heritage Region is ready, willing, and able to become a National Heritage Region. On behalf of the people of Venango County and our neighbors in Crawford County, I respectfully submit that the birth of the oil industry was a world changing event. I respectfully submit that the Oil Industry continues to influence world affairs. I respectfully submit that the people of Venango and Crawford Counties, Pennsylvania have demonstrated the passion, capacity, and stewardship to manage the responsibilities of National Heritage Designation. We do and will continue to preserve the oil artifacts, welcome our visitors, sustain the natural resources, encourage entrepreneurs, and share our stories with guests of all ages.

I respectfully submit that the events that happened in the Oil Heritage Region – and the people who live there - are worthy of recognition and support by the Congress of the United States of America. And I humbly ask for your support by designating the Oil Region National Heritage Area.